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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the types of learning disabilities that may carry over from childhood into the adolescent years, and it notes that learning disabilities of secondary-level students have been neglected by researchers and by curriculum planners. The paper then suggests goals and objectives and notes personnel needs for a secondary-level learning disabilities program. It discusses the need for a curriculum that does not depend on the use of traditional textbooks for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, and it proposes a career-development program that culminates in the school's helping to find jobs for learning disabled students. (GW)

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A Suggested Program for Secondary Disabled Learners

Presently, our educational system suggests that students who graduate from elementary school become instant excellent readers, writers, mathematicians, and thinkers. It seems that they overcome their learning disabilities upon graduation from the elementary grades. Of course, in reality this is not true. Mann (1969) cited Wirtz's estimation of the national prevalence of learning disability children to be about one percent in 1965. Shaw and Shaw (1972) estimated that about 8 million elementary and secondary school children in American today will not learn to read adequately. One child in seven is limited in his ability to acquire essential reading skills. Within the American educational system an estimated 15% of otherwise capable students experience difficulty in learning to read. Also, Silberberg and Silberberg (1969) stated that many educational experts estimate that the number of children with reading difficulties approximate 20 percent of the school population who have normal intelligence. In addition to this, 25% of the children have IQ's below 90. In all probability, many or most of this latter group do not find reading an efficient method of gaining knowledge. With estimations like these, there is no room for the secondary staff to blame the elementary staff. Since these children have reached the secondary level with these problems, it is now the responsibility of the secondary staff to plan a program to help these students.

Through the review of the literature, it was quite astonishing to find such limited amount of research on the secondary level learning disabilities. According to Werkman (1970), most children do not outgrow brain dysfunction. Evidence of perceptual-motor difficulties, hyperactivity, and characteristic cognitive deficits are still visible in adolescence. Since there was limited research in the area, then may be this is an indicator of some weaknesses in our educational system. To correct this wrong, general and special educators should wake up and accept their responsibilities

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and do something for our young people. As Kleine (1972) so beautifully says it, "Eight million children are waiting. How long will we keep them waiting? How long will they be content to wait?" Following is a proposal which attempts to provide the framework for developing a secondary program to accommodate the various ways children learn.

An introduction to learning disabilities begins with the label itself. Gearheart (1973) stated that there are only three characteristics that all learning disability children have in common: (1) they must have average or above intelligence, (2) they must have adequate sensory acuity, and (3) they must be achieving considerably less than the composite of their IQ, age, and educational opportunity (health, availability of schooling, and cultural opportunity) would predict. Characteristic three is what Gearheart refers to as a significant educational discrepancy.

There are other characteristics that have been associated with learning disabilities children. Some of these characteristics may carry over into the adolescent years (Gearheart, 1973):

1. hyperactivity or hypoactivity
2. lack of motivation
3. inattention or overattention
4. perceptual disorders
5. lack of coordination
6. perseveration
7. memory disorder

The problem of helping the learning disabled child is further complicated by the many characteristics of the child and his learning environment that have a bearing on his learning growth. It is necessary to adjust to some of the variation within the physical, emotional, intellectual, and environmental factors if learning growth is to progress smoothly or at all. Hence, any attempt to give a child remedial instruction must be based on a thorough diagnosis of his unique learning needs and personal characteristics. Such a diagnosis is the very core of a successful program of correction, whether they are for less complex problems met in the

classroom or for the clinic.

The next step involves establishing goals and objectives for the program. The following goals and objectives are suggested; however, a program should not be limited to these only:

Goals and Objectives for the New Program

1. Each child will build his self-concept and sense of responsibility for his actions and behaviors.

2. Each child will acquire basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.

3. Each child will learn the appropriate behaviors and social skills accepted by our society.

4. Each child will become competent in a vocation to start a job or to go into advanced vocational training. The staff will assist each child in getting a job.

Staff and Personnel

It is suggested that the secondary learning disability program have its own staff and personnel to solve special problems and to keep an update evaluation of each child and the program. Of course, the special education staff will work closely with the general education staff. The staff should consist of the following:

Counselors(one per fifty students)
Diagnosticians (one per fifty students)
School Psychologist
Program Coordinator
Learning Disability Specialists
Reading Specialists

It is not recommended that the students be completely separated from other children in the learning situation. They will take many of their vocational electives, physical education, art, music, and other general electives with the rest of the student body. It is important that these children learn socializing skills which include getting along with all kinds of people. It is strongly believed by the writer that the general education staff

is not trained to work with special problems and the staff is not large enough to work with each of the students individually who have special problems.

Methods and Materials

The first point deals with the development of a bookless curriculum (Silberberg & Silberberg 69). This principle simply states that it would be unrealistic for teachers to expect students who are having reading problems to gain adequate knowledge of the subject-matter through a course outline centered around the textbook. In short, the subject-matter teacher should not penalized deficient readers by refusing to provide opportunities for them to be exposed to the subject. Hence, in the bookless curriculum approach, the use of traditional textbooks would be eliminated. The basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills will be taught. Basic reading skills will be taught through the use of newspapers, magazines, novels, comic books, cookbooks and mechanical manuals. All other required knowledge will be taught through the use of such media as: tape records, books on records, films, projectors, art, music, role playing, field trips, discussions, guest lectures, radio and television.

The basic writing skill lessons will be centered around handwriting, friendly letter writing, business letter writing, application completion, resume writing, and other life required writings. For students who are not having severe writing or reading problems, higher level of instruction will be taken to meet their highest potentials and needs.

The basic arithmetic skills will center around money transactions and measurement taking. All advance arithmethical reasoning and computation courses will be eliminated. If there are students who have potentials and needs for these areas, they will be allowed the chance to take advance courses.

The second point deals with the development of a career development center program. This phase of the program provides alternatives for the many students who have met failure in the traditional educational system. Due to these failures, they have also met failure in the labor market. Hence, another goal of

this program is to provide these students with marketable skills.

This program begins with an exhaustive survey of the job market in the students' immediate community and across the state so that the skills taught will really be salable. In addition to teaching these skills, the program should provide the students with experiences and develop attitudes which will make their successful adjustment to the world of work easier. This training would include more than the cognitive training; it would move into the affective training -- teaching students to be socially responsible.

The third step requires each student to be thoroughly diagnosed in order to find his strengths, weaknesses, and interests. After which, he and the counselor will discuss his strengths and weaknesses and what vocation that interests him. They will also discuss the available programs that the school offers. The student will choose his program and he has the option to change his mind at any time. However, the student has to understand that he has to complete a program to be eligible to graduate. Throughout the program, the student, his peers and the staff will evaluate his progress.

Finally, the school should act as an employment agency. There should be a rapport between the school and all possible employers; hence, the school should take an active role to insure all of the students who graduate from the program will have a job. Also, the staff must be available to help the students to adjust to their jobs and their new environments.

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